

## Princeton Application

A creek is no place for shoes. I think it's unreasonable to ask children to keep their shoes on in such a place. My bare feet were always covered with calluses from walking down the rough pavement of Peardale Street and around the corner, past the weeping willows, but not as far as the Lindsay's squeaky old swing-set. It was hard to see from the road, and as far as I could tell, nobody ever went there- except for me. Large pines nearby stood tall and erect, looking down at the ripples and currents that nudged each other about playfully, like children in the back seat of a car on a long drive. Stones and pebbles lined the shallow bottom and allowed the water to glide in creative patterns over their smooth surfaces. Larger, moss-covered rocks dotted the bank and provided ideal spots for a child to sit and watch and wonder.

The creek often taught me things; it was my mentor. Once I discovered tadpoles in several of the many eddies and stagnant pools that lined the small rivulet. A cupped hand and a cleaned-out mayonnaise jar aided me in clumsily scooping up some of the more slothful individuals. With muddy hands and knees, I set them on the kitchen counter, and watched them daily as they developed into tiny frogs. I was fascinated by what was taking place before my eyes, but new questions constantly puzzled me. Dad was usually responsible for assuaging these curiosities. He told me about different kinds of metamorphosis and how other little tiny creatures lived in the water that I couldn't see without a fancy magnifying glass.

By the creek, my mind was free to wander. I remember sitting silently on a mossy rock and watching the birds; I used to pretend I was one. As my body lay still, my imagination would take flight. High above, looking down on this stream from the pale blue heavens, the wind whistled over my face and the sun warmed my body. When my eyes flickered open, it was usually time to go home. Sometimes I even did.

I was always up for a challenge. My sister and I used to jump from rock to rock, in a kind of improvised hopscotch obstacle course that tested our balance and agility against one another. She was four years older and I had to practice every morning when she was at school in order to keep up. On the rare occasions that I outdid her, I wore a goofy smirk for the rest of the day.

The creek was a frontier. The stream extended far into the depths of the woods. I thought that if I wandered too far into its darkness, I might be consumed by it and never heard from again. Gradually overcoming my fear, I embarked on expeditions and drafted extensive maps using my father's old compass, a sheet of paper, and a few colored pencils. As my body grew in height and weight, my boundaries grew in extent and breadth.

Years later, I happened to be walking to a friend's house by way of the creek. It occurred to me that what was once an expedition was now merely a shortcut. Although I had left this stream behind, I found others: new questions and freedoms, new challenges and places to explore. But this creek would remain foremost in my memory, whatever stream, river, or ocean I might wade.